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RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/COMFLEACT OKINAWA JA
RHMFISS/COMMARCORBASESJAPAN CAMP BUTLER JA
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RHHMHAA/COMPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI
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RHHMBRA/JICPAC PEARL HARBOR HI
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 0788
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/NAVCRIMINVSERVFO FAREAST YOKOSUKA JA
RHMFISS/NAVCRIMINVSERVRA OKINAWA JA
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0731
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RUALBCC/YOKOTA AB HQ USFJ
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0009
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NAHA 000049

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/16/2032
TAGS: [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [JA](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: WEATHER GIVES OKINAWA GOVERNOR OPTION OF SIDE-STEPPING
SENKAKUS VISIT

CLASSIFIED BY: Kevin K. Maher, Consul General, U.S. Consulate
General Naha, U.S. Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

(SBU) Summary: The new administration of Okinawa Prefectural Governor Nakaima made its first large public misstep on the international stage, when it cancelled a publicly-announced over flight of the disputed Senkaku Islands. While Japan considers the Senkakus part of Okinawa Prefecture, China and Taiwan also claim them. Shortly after the governor announced his intent to visit the Senkakus, courtesy of the Japan Air Self Defense Force, local representatives of China and Taiwan sent protest letters. A hasty consultation with the governor's executive committee revealed a number of drawbacks for the prefecture in irritating China, but the conservative governor was loath to be

seen as giving in to China's claims. Providently nasty weather the morning of the planned flight permitted the governor to postpone the visit, and spend some time thinking about his next move. End summary.

(U) On March 6 Okinawa Prefectural Governor Hirokazu NAKAIMA publicly announced plans to fly over the Senkaku Island chain on March 13, courtesy of Japan's Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF). The island chain is uninhabited and considered by the GOJ to be part of Okinawa Prefecture. China and Taiwan also claim the Senkakus. The United States does not take a position on the sovereignty of the islands, but considers them within territory under Japanese administration. There are firing ranges and water training areas provided under the Status of Forces Agreement for US military use on and around the islands of what the central government calls Kuba Jima (Kobi-sho on USG-GOJ maps and Huangwei Yu in Chinese, using identical Chinese characters) and Taisho Jima (Sekibi-sho and Chuiwei Yu). The areas have not been used by the US military for decades, but Okinawa and mainland Japanese papers reported the purpose of the governor's visit was to view the military facilities.

(SBU) Reiji FUMOTO, the Okinawa Prefectural Government's (OPG's) senior counselor for Military Base Affairs, told us that the trip was one of many Nakaima was making to see all of the territory within Okinawa prefecture, not specifically the U.S. military areas. Apparently the JASDF needed a military-related reason in order to justify flying a prefectural governor, and the old training ranges provided the link. The press reported Nakaima also planned to fly over the oil and gas fields in the East China Sea to consider whether they could be exploited to Okinawa's benefit. Several of our contacts in Okinawa's business and political circles have told us they, too, have

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flown out on JASDF or Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces (JMSDF) planes on "fact finding missions."

(C) Within days of Nakaima's announcement, the Chinese Consulate General in Fukuoka (whose consular district includes Okinawa Prefecture) sent a letter protesting the visit to disputed territory, and requesting Nakaima cancel his trip. The letter advised that Nakaima's visit could have a negative effect on Sino-Japanese relations. The Taiwan equivalent to a consulate general also sent a protest letter. Nakaima initially shrugged off the requests, asking rhetorically why he ought not visit islands in his own prefecture. MOFA's Special Ambassador to Okinawa Toshinori SHIGEIE told ConGen Maher that he had advised Nakaima that MOFA would not oppose him visiting the Senkakus. He added, however, that MOFA hoped to avoid taking a public stance on Nakaima's trip, due to the pending visits of high-level Chinese officials to Tokyo. MOFA was apparently not speaking with one voice at all levels, however. An Embassy Tokyo contact at the OPG office in Tokyo said MOFA "highhandedly" urged the OPG to reconsider the governor's flight.

(C) Notwithstanding his public nonchalance, Nakaima called together his two vice governors and treasurer on March 12 to reconsider whether to make the trip. Afterwards, OPG announced that the over flight would go forward as scheduled on March 13. Meanwhile, staff at the OPG's military affairs office privately told ConGen Naha that it would, in fact, be postponed. Later, at the ConGen's residence, Vice Governor Zenki NAKAZATO was preoccupied. He worried aloud to dinner guests, who included visiting Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer and China hand Frank Januzzi. Nakazato was most afraid the flight could adversely impact an agreement with China to lend the OPG some Ryukyu Kingdom artifacts from the Chinese National Museum for the November opening of the new Okinawa Prefectural Museum. Nakazato was also concerned that the over flight might derail discussions regarding direct commercial air service between Beijing and Naha.

(C) On the other hand, Nakaima himself was determined not be seen as deferring to Chinese claims to the Senkakus. He had received calls from various leading conservatives, including

former Minister for Okinawan Affairs Toshimitsu MOTEGI, urging him to hold fast and make the trip. OPG sources told us they and the governor were genuinely surprised by the international attention, and were in a bind. The prefecture wanted to avoid crossing the Chinese, without appearing to cave in to their demands. Januzzi, half in jest, told Nakazato the governor's best course of action was to pray for bad weather so he could postpone the flight.

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(C) The morning of March 13, Nakaima went to the airport and met with the commander of the JASDF based in Okinawa, as scheduled. The skies were heavily overcast, with wind gusts and rain showers. Accompanied by the JASDF commanding officer, Nakaima announced to the gathered media that his trip was postponed due to unfavorable weather conditions. He insisted to reporters that the postponement had nothing to do with outside pressure, and that he wanted to reschedule the over flight as soon as feasible. The Ryukyu Shimpo opined on March 14 that the governor put himself in a bind, saying that unidentified OPG officials strongly implied that the postponement was, in fact, indefinite (i.e., permanent.) Embassy Tokyo's contact at the OPG's Tokyo office said that announcing the trip in advance had been a strategic mistake, and it was unlikely Nakaima would ever execute the planned visit.

(C) March 14 Hiroshi NAKAMATSU, Executive Director of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP's) Okinawa branch, also told us that Nakaima should have just flown to the Senkakus without announcing it in advance. Okinawa Prefectural Assembly members, Okinawa Chamber of Commerce members, and political party leadership, including Nakamatsu, flew out to the Senkaku islands from time to time, courtesy of either the JMSDF or the JASDF. Nakamatsu speculated that Nakaima had probably already seen the Senkakus because of his roles as head of Okinawa Electric Company, chairman of the Defense Association, or chairman of the Okinawa Chamber of Commerce. Perhaps, Nakamatsu guessed, Nakaima and the few OPG officials with whom he consulted in advance just failed to imagine that his role as governor would make a difference

(C) Comment: We think it is possible that OPG career officials were genuinely surprised by the international reaction. The issue would certainly not have been discussed during eight years under the administration of the extremely cautious previous governor, Keiichi Inamine. JASDF/JMSDF fly overs for Okinawa's political and business leaders are almost matter-of-course. In late 2006 Consul General Maher himself was offered the chance to ride along on a JMSDF flight carrying local business leaders (which he politely declined, citing a scheduling conflict.) The OPG has been entirely directed toward intra-prefectural concerns and its relationship with the national government, and its international contacts have been limited to commercial and cultural issues. Career OPG staff is now on alert and decidedly leery of attempting another Senkaku trip. As for Nakaima himself, he has struck us as a tenacious and savvy operator. It seems unlikely that he was caught wholly unaware by the controversy. Nakaima might postpone the flight to a date with lower risk of endangering OPG interests, but we suspect there will one day be press reports of a completed over flight. End

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Comment.
MAHER